DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 424 788 FL 025 612

TITLE	Scheduling Foreign Languages on the Block. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-FL-98-09
PUB DATE	1998-10-00
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	RR93002010
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC/CLL, 4646 40th Street NW, Washington, DC 20016; Web site: http://www.cal.org/ericcll
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Advanced Courses; *Articulation (Education); *Block Scheduling; Educational Strategies; Elementary Secondary Education; Language Proficiency; Retention (Psychology); Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning; Time Factors (Learning)
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

This digest provides a description of block scheduling and discusses specific advantages, concerns, and considerations of block scheduling and foreign language instruction and learning. Block scheduling is a reorganization of school time that comes in many complex variations, including 4x4 (four blocks of 90 minutes each) and A/B (eight blocks taught on alternate days throughout the year) schedules. Advantages discussed include more concentration in the language being studied, the potential of longer class periods, more opportunities to offer and take advanced courses, an increased number of possibilities for selecting electives, and more time to internalize the language. Concerns and considerations include sequencing of foreign language courses, availability of courses, development of language proficiency, language retention, and articulation. Scheduling issues are also addressed. Included are several suggestions for scheduling foreign language courses on the block. (JL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 424 788

ERIC Digest

Scheduling Foreign Languages on the Block

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

FL 025612

ERIC®
CLEARINGHOUSE ON LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS
CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS
Digest
October 1998
(EDO-FL-98-09)

Scheduling Foreign Languages on the Block

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

Educators have only recently begun to realize the potential of scheduling to improve schools. One such attempt, block scheduling, affects many aspects of the school environment, both organizationally and educationally. It comes in many complex variations, including four-block schedules (see descriptions below) (Canady and Rettig, 1995).

Block scheduling rests on the premise that it will give teachers more instructional flexibility (Carroll, 1990), reduce the fragmentation of the day, and allow teachers to adapt their instructional strategies to address the different ways in which students learn. In North Carolina, interest in block scheduling became apparent after the State Board of Education decided to increase the graduation requirement from 11 to 14 courses in 1991. The increased number of graduation requirements made it much more difficult for students to select electives or concentrate on the extended study of one discipline.

Scheduling on the Block

Block scheduling is a reorganization of school time. One type of block scheduling is referred to as 4x4, or a concentrated curriculum or semester plan. The typical 4x4 schedule consists of "four blocks of 90 minutes each (see Figure 1). By doubling the length of class periods, students complete the equivalent of four 180-day courses every 90 days. After the first session ends, students take four new courses in the second 90-day session" (Edwards, 1995). Another version of block scheduling involves eight blocks taught on alternate days (A/B days) throughout the year (see Figure 2).

Figure 1
4x4 Schedule

Blocks	First Semester	Second Semester
Block I	Course 1	Course 5
Block II	Course 2	Course 6
Lunch		
Block III	Course 3	Course 7
Block IV	Course 4	Course 8

Figure 2
A/B Schedule

Days	A Day Mon.	B Day Tues.	A Day Wed.	B Day Thurs.	A Day Fri.	B Day Mon.
Block I	Course 1	Course 2	Course 1	Course 2	Course 1	Course 2
Block II	Course 3	Course 4	Course 3	Course 4	Course 3	Course 4
Block III	Course 5	Course 6	Course 5	Course 6	Course 5	Course 6
Block IV	Course 7	Course 8	Course 7	Course 8	Course 7	Course 8

Advantages of Block Scheduling for Foreign Languages

While block scheduling offers a variety of benefits for all teachers and students, there are some advantages that are especially promising for foreign languages. For example, block scheduling allows for more concentration in the foreign language being studied. The longer class periods offer exciting opportunities for both learners and teachers at the higher levels of language study, where students are able to comprehend the language and work with a variety of texts (oral, visual, and written) and communicative activities. In block scheduling, students have more opportunities to work with teachers and with one another. Other advantages include these:

• There are more opportunities to offer and to take advanced courses (see Figure 3 below).

Figure 3

	180 Day Courses	90 Day Courses
9th Grade	FL Course 1 (2 semesters)	FL Course 1 (1st Sem.) FL Course 2 (2nd Sem.)
10th Grade	FL Course 2 (2 semesters)	FL Course 3 (1st Sem.) FL Course 4 (2nd Sem.)
11th Grade	FL Course 3 (2 Semesters)	FL Course 5 (1st Sem.) FL Course 6 (2nd Sem.)
12th Grade	FL Course 4 (2 Semesters)	FL Course 7 (1st Sem.) FL Course 8 (2nd Sem.)

• Students have an increased number of possibilities for selecting electives. Under block scheduling, there are 32 different slots (8 per year x 4) for course work as opposed to 24 (6 per year x 4 per year) under a traditional schedule.
• Students have more time to internalize the language.

Concerns

There are several areas of concern that specifically affect block scheduling and foreign language education. These concerns need to be taken into consideration when planning a quality program.

Sequencing of foreign language courses. It is especially important when planning the schedule to ensure that courses are offered sequentially so students have the option to continue the study of the language without long time lapses. It is equally important for students to realize that extended interruptions will have an impact on their level of language proficiency.

Availability of courses. Students pursuing more advanced levels of language study are frequently enrolled in advanced courses in other disciplines as well. For this reason, it is essential to guarantee that singleton courses in the upper levels are scheduled in order to avoid potential conflict. In addition, students who delay their study of the foreign language until the last two semesters of their senior year must have the courses available to meet their college entrance requirements.

Development of language proficiency. Foreign language educators are greatly concerned about the impact of the block schedule on the development of foreign language proficiency. Their concerns

are based on the belief that language development occurs during a long, uninterrupted sequence of language study. At this time, there are no data, other than anecdotal, to support the positive or negative effects of block scheduling on language development.

Articulation. Teachers on block scheduling have found articulation to be a difficult issue. It is of particular concern for language teachers who teach on a 4x4 plan. The alternate day (A/B day) is less bothersome, because it is set over one year. Foreign language teachers are concerned that unless students avoid long interruptions in foreign language learning, language loss will prevent students from reaching the necessary goals for functioning effectively at the next level of instruction. In addition, students who do not take the foreign language course sequentially (i.e., who wait one or more semesters in between courses) will be placed at a disadvantage when enrolled in a class with students who have just completed the previous course the previous semester.

Retention. Anecdotal accounts of students' language retention seem to point out that the loss of language is no greater after a one or two semester break than it would be after the summer recess. Canady and Rettig quote research dealing with retention rates at the college level: "Students retain 85% of what they had originally learned after 4 months and 80% of what they had originally learned after 11 months." They also point to another study that states that students have a tendency to forget the factual information they have learned very quickly, whereas when students have been involved in critical thinking and have had an opportunity to internalize information, they retain the information longer.

Scheduling Issues

The following issues must be addressed when scheduling foreign language courses on the block.

Availability of courses. Courses must be available and scheduled sequentially to ensure smooth articulation between the various levels of language instruction. When the beginning levels of language are offered each semester, students can plan their language tudy without suffering from extended time interruptions.

When to begin language instruction. When students begin and nd their course sequence will be largely affected by their previous nvolvement with the foreign language. Students who have had an lementary or middle school experience may place directly into a evel II or Level III course in high school. These students will also eed opportunities to continue their study at more advanced levels.

College-bound students. Students who are not interested in xtended language study, but who are planning to attend college, ay not opt to complete the college foreign language requirement ntil their last two years of high school. This can have a major impact n the enrollments in level I and II foreign language courses. herefore, the availability of those courses will need to be closely xamined to guarantee that there are no conflicts with singleton ourses in other areas needed or recommended for college entrance.

Class size. Teachers in North Carolina are reporting increased enrollments at all levels of foreign language instruction. Consequently, in the absence of additional faculty, class sizes are also being affected. Because the beginning levels of foreign language study are so focused on the development of oral and aural skills, students must have the opportunity to be directly involved with the language in a variety of ways. Smaller classes can promote the interaction needed for successful development of language skills.

Combination classes. In many instances, there may not be enough students at advanced levels of the foreign language to warrant scheduling individual classes. When necessary, advanced levels can be combined provided the students' levels of language are not too far apart. In North Carolina, Level III/IV or IV/V combinations are widespread. In several cases, teachers combined Level IV and Advanced Placement courses.

Suggestions

Although there are many ways to schedule for the block, the majority of North Carolina schools have chosen the 4x4 schedule—with the four courses per semester option—over the A/B alternate schedule, because the 4x4 schedule provides for continuity of daily instruction. Following are several additional suggestions for scheduling foreign language courses on the block.

- Add additional levels of language for extended studies in one language.
- Have students take levels I and II of the language in back-to-back semesters" (Shoenstein, 1996).
- Use three 90-minute blocks, and break the remaining block into two 45-minute periods that are offered throughout the year as singletons to address selected courses needing continuity such as foreign language and band.
- Offer first- and third-year classes during the second semester and second- and fourth-year classes during the first semester. With this scheduling option, a student takes the first course and only misses a summer of instruction before the second one.
- Allow students to enroll in college courses when the foreign language courses are not available at the high school level for continued or extended study (Rettig and Canady, 1995).

Conclusion

Successful block scheduling requires fundamental changes in instruction. To make the transition from traditional to block scheduling, teachers need training to expand their repertoire of strategies (Wisconsin Association of Foreign Language Teachers, 1995). Administrators can help foreign language teachers make the transition from the traditional schedule to the block schedule by providing staff development that emphasizes instructional strategies and the use of technology; affording teachers the option to observe foreign language programs that have successfully moved to block scheduling; scheduling time for teachers to evaluate and adjust their local curriculum; and giving teachers time to plan and to adjust to their new routine.

References

Canady, R.L. & Rettig, M.D. (1995). *Block scheduling: A catalyst for change in high schools*. Princeton, NJ: Eye on Education.

Carroll, J.M. (1990). The Copernican plan: Restructuring the American high school. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 28-33.

Edwards, Jr., C.M (1995). The 4x4 plan. *Educational Leadership, 53*, 16-19.

Shoenstein, R. (1996). The new school on the block. *The Executive Educator, 17*, 18-21.

Wisconsin Association of Foreign Language Teachers. (1995). *Redesigning school schedules*. Author.

This Digest is drawn from ***Foreign Language on the Block*** (1996), a report published by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

This report was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Dept. of Education, National Library of Education, under contract no. RR93002010. The opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of OERI or ED.